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A Fairy Tale in Focus: Ecstatic Focalizations in *A Christmas Carol*

English classics have been out of favour with narratology and narrative theorists. The reasons for this may be many. Narrative theory is peculiar for being created and maintained as an international endeavour. The leading researchers, past and present, include a large cohort of Americans (Seymour Chatman, Gerald Prince, David Herman, and Brian Richardson), many Frenchmen, including the “founding fathers” of narratology (Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov), and a considerable number of distinguished Germans (F.K. Stanzel, Monika Fludernik). Other of the non-English speaking nations are also represented: the Dutch (Mieke Bal), the Polish (Michał Głowiński), and the Swiss (Marie-Laure Ryan). In the group we are surprised to find few English narratologists. Done over the past several decades, the research has formed and focused on something like a canon of authors (and works) to whom (and to which) the theorists have paid special attention: Gustave Flaubert, Marcel Proust, Henry James, Ernest Hemingway among them. Again, none of these are British classics. The result is that the English canonical authors, Charles Dickens included, have not been paid the due tribute of a literary history in the shape of a series of studies written with the help of tools fashioned by narratology. The aim of this article is to use some such tools and in particular to foreground one of the theory’s basic ideas and insights, that of focalization, in an analysis of Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (1843). I intend to show, first of all, that this kind of analysis makes sense and does not mean doing violence to this masterpiece. I wish to show, on the contrary, that an analysis in pursuit of basic narrative strategies both enriches our knowledge of an author’s technique – here Dickens’s – and, at the same time, contributes to our understanding of the uses of focalization by a skilful and highly self-conscious author.

In a recent study of *A Christmas Carol*, the story has been called a fairy tale. Harry Stone places the story in a wider context, that of the Christmas ghost stories, so popular among the Victorian reading public. The convention, Stone argues, was used by Dickens for a higher purpose – that is, to provide a moral rather than simply scare the reader: “The Christmas books [by Dickens] draw their innermost energies from fairy tales: they exploit fairy-tale themes, fairy-tale happenings, and fairy-tale techniques. Indeed the Christmas books are fairy tales. As Dickens himself put it, he was here taking old nursery tales and ‘giving them a higher form.’”¹ Stone goes on to explain that the design includes the following features: “A protagonist who is mistaken or displays false values is forced, through a series of extraordinary events, to see his errors.” Moreover: “Magical happenings dominate the story. The crucial action takes place in a dream or vision presided over by supernatural creatures who control what goes on.” Finally, “in the fashion of most fairy stories, the moral is strongly reiterated at the end.”²

Without intending this as an objection, let me remark that Stone’s interpretation, interesting and insightful as it is, ignores an issue which – as I hope to make clear in the remainder of this article – is crucial to Dickens’s purposes and devices, namely that of perspective or point of view. What matters greatly in the *Carol* is what I will call a split or double point of view; Dickens uses this device – or makes his spirits use it – as a method of Ebenezer Scrooge’s moral transformation from a heartless miser and an exploitative capitalist into a kind fellow-being and a philanthropist. Superficially regarded, the story’s use of the third-person type of narration looks common; however, when we analyse it with the help of the idea of focalization,³ it turns out to be a bold experiment in narrative mood. In my analysis of the *Carol* I will make use of the existing state of knowledge on the subject, without going into polemics, yet proposing amplifications. I will chiefly, if critically, avail myself of Mieke Bal’s treatment of the subject in a chapter of her *Narratology* (second edition, 1997);

¹ Harry Stone, “*A Christmas Carol*: Giving Nursery Tales a Higher Form,” in *The Haunted Mind: The Supernatural in Victorian Literature*, eds. Elton E. Smith and Robert Haas (Lanham, Md. and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1999), 11.

² Stone, “*A Christmas Carol*,” 11–2.

³ The term does not occur in publications in a “British” spelling.

but to introduce the problematic I will first avail myself of a passage from Gérard Genette's ground-breaking *Narrative Discourse*, in which Genette explains the need to carefully distinguish "mood" from "voice." Genette regards as regrettable this very common confusion: "a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?* – or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*"⁴ Mieke Bal restates this distinction in the following way: "All these typologies [of narrative points of view] [are] unclear on one point. They do not make a distinction between, on the one hand, the vision through which the elements [of a narrative] are presented and, on the other, the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision. To put it more simply, they do not make a distinction between those who see and those who speak. Nevertheless, it is possible, both in fiction and in reality, for one person to express the vision of another."⁵

This is, however, just the starting point, for focalization comes in varieties; besides, within one narrative, especially if it happens to be a novel, say, *Madame Bovary*, there may occur shifts between those varieties. The most basic distinction is between external and internal types of focalization. A narrative is focalized *externally*, if the represented world is not "filtered" through a consciousness (i.e. not "reflected" in the mind of a character). A narrative is focalized *internally* if the contrary is true; the representation of the fictive world is filtered through a mind, usually the mind of a character who is a part of and an actor in the portrayed reality, often the main protagonist. The latter is the case in the *Carol*, although, as we shall see presently, on close inspection things are far from simple.

Before we proceed, we need to sharpen some of these tools to make them useful in our analysis of the complex ways in which Dickens focal-

⁴ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983; French edition 1972), 186; italics in the original.

⁵ Mieke Bal, *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2007; 2nd edition), 143. That Genette's sharp distinction has not been accepted as unproblematic is evidenced by more than one essay in *Point of View, Perspective, and Focalization: Modelling Mediation in Narrative*, eds. Peter Hühn, Wolf Schmid, and Jörg Schönert (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009). Indeed, also in our analysis of the *Carol* we will look at passages that seem to make it doubtful in certain cases.

izes his narrative. Usually, scholars address the issue as a question about “who sees?” or more generally “who perceives?” and leave it at that (Genette himself has come to realise this shortcoming in his initial approach). In my opinion, a broadened and perhaps a deepened approach is not only possible but desirable. In what follows I propose to add two other aspects or varieties of internal focalization and, for the sake of keeping things conveniently simple, I concentrate almost exclusively on how verbs convey all three varieties:⁶

1. verbs of perception, e.g. “to see” and generally verbs designating other modes (or acts, in the language of phenomenology) of *sensory perception*;
2. verbs of cognition and knowledge, e.g. “to know,” “to understand,” “to remember,” “to imagine” (these remind us of the term “reflection” in John Locke’s theory of knowledge); this language expresses various *cognitive acts*, or in other words the mental life of a person;⁷
3. verbs that convey emotional states; to simplify matters, but also to revive a valuable tradition in the British philosophy of the human mind, we can call this the language of the passions: “to enjoy,” “to grieve,” “to dislike,” etc.; using more contemporary terminology and broadening the notion of this variety, we might wish to speak of emotive responses to objects of the focalizing character’s perception or cognition.⁸

⁶ My typology is similar to, though is not directly based on, that proposed by David Herman; see his David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 307–8. Herman names three types of focalizing verbs: verbs of perception, cognition, and emotion. To illustrate the differences Herman quotes a passage from Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*. The verbs he *emphasises* are actually rather ambiguous: “to seem” occurs twice and then there is also the phrase “Ellena felt that she understood all the feelings [...]” Herman seems to be aware himself that the examples have not been well chosen.

⁷ Some narratologists, when referring to cognition and its role in focalization, prefer using the word “to process.” Not a nice word in itself, perhaps, but helpful in that it names what is important: e.g. understanding is a mental process that may consist in making sense of data acquired through sensory perception. For Locke’s notion of reflection see *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II.i.4. (Let me observe in passing that narratologists, also those who study focalization, rarely make use of existing epistemologies; this cannot but result in simplification and superficiality.)

⁸ Compare the phrase “emotional engagement with object domain” used by Jan Christoph Meister and Jörg Schöner in their “The DNS of Mediacy,” see *Point of View, Perspective, and Focali-*

Already the first chapter, or “stave,” of the *Carol* provides plenty of illustrative material, especially in the part describing the ghostly encounter. On coming home from “his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern,” an action that the narrator does not bother to focalize internally, Scrooge is surprised to find his knocker transformed into a human face, that of his long-dead partner: “And then let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, without its undergoing any intermediate process of change – not a knocker, but Marley’s face.”⁹ This is a crucial moment, a moment that affects the entire course of the story in that it opens it onto a reality that will govern it. But the narrator is far more interested in how his human protagonist responds to the fantastic transformation of the mundane object. To be sure, Marley’s face is described in some detail, but then the focus is on Scrooge. We read:

As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again. To say that he was not startled, or that *his blood was not conscious of a terrible sensation to which it had been a stranger from infancy*, would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key he had relinquished, turned it sturdily, walked in, and lighted his candle.¹⁰

This is a curious passage due to the switching back and forth between internal and external focalization: only the italicised part of the second sentence uses Scrooge as the focalizer, conveying, albeit in an oblique manner, the sensation of terror produced by the inexplicable event. It will

zation: *Modelling Mediation in Narrative*, eds. Peter Hühn, Wolf Schmid, and Jörg Schönert, 11–40 (DNS stands for Dynamic Narrative System).

⁹ Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Books* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17; my emphasis.

¹⁰ My emphasis. Dickens teases the reader by making Marley pose this philosophical problem to the sceptical Scrooge: “What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of the senses?” and then “Why do you doubt your senses” (Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 21). However, as our analysis shows, Dickens does not want to go too far in how the representation of events in his story is mediated or filtered through the mind of his protagonist. He never gives up his prerogative, as we might put it, to switch to external focalization when he thinks that the reader might need to rely on a chunk of “objective” reality.

be noted – and I believe it is important for the message of the story – that the fact of Marley’s face turning back into the knocker is not conveyed as Scrooge’s act of vision, but precisely as an action, an objective event: “Scrooge looked fixedly,” similarly, describes an act of perception (the action of focusing one’s gaze), to be sure, but without however focalizing it internally.

Our typology, no matter how sketchy and provisional, already gives one an idea about how complex the issue of internal focalization really is. Bal herself – despite her determination to narrow down her discussion to the first variety (vision, perception) – argues that there is no point in expecting a totally objective representation of reality; certainly not, we might add, in fiction, and even the less so in fictions in which the mode of narration foregrounds, or exposes, as it were, the essential subjectivity of a “world picture.” She writes in the chapter on focalization: “Perception depends on so many factors that that striving for objectivity is pointless. To mention only a few factors: one’s position with respect to the perceived object, the fall of the light, the distance, previous knowledge, psychological attitude towards the object; all this and more affects the picture one forms and passes on to others.”¹¹ But this is part of my point: Why then concentrate exclusively on perception, if, even when we do, it soon becomes obvious that there is more to internal focalization than that?

Someone may object that, in our approach, the broadening of the subjective side of the issue will result in wiping out the object from the picture. I can imagine Bal stating this very objection, because for her focalization is “the *relation* between the vision and that which is ‘seen,’ perceived.”¹² So, if focalization is chiefly about how the focalizer perceptively *relates* to objects that surround him or her, the other aspects do not matter. But we have just seen that Bal convincingly argues, as it were against the main

¹¹ Bal, *Narratology*, 142. Manfred Jahn finds the term *apperception* useful: “it is well nigh impossible to deny that psychology, cognition, emotion, and ideology have a direct impact on perception. For this reason the term *apperception* is often used to designate both the interpretive nature of perception and one’s understanding something in ‘frames’ of previous experience.” Manfred Jahn, “Focalization,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 101; Jahn’s italics.

¹² Bal, *Narratology*, 142; my emphasis.

drift of her analysis, that to focus exclusively on perception is perhaps impossible. I would add that even if a scholar insisted that it was, she ought to reflect critically on the consequences of such delimitation. The problem that arises, if we narrow the idea of internal focalization to sensory perception, is how to make sense of that verbal texture and those narrative situations that deepen the representation of the focalizer, thus broadening our understanding of the uses of this type of focalization? Such is, I submit, the case with Dickens, determined to render fuller and indeed more human this particular narrative device (if this is not too anachronistic a manner of putting it). An examination of the *Carol* confirms this view, namely that internal focalization can take us beyond the “pure” phenomenology of seeing or vision.

The rather pedestrian and unremarkable issue of speaking in the *Carol* seems to be of secondary importance. Let us, however, remark in passing that, as always with Dickens, it is not entirely unworthy of note. In the figure of the narrator we do recognise, after all, the familiar voice of the author, sometimes jovial and facetious (as in the opening comments on the similarity between the ghost of Old Hamlet and that of Marley), sometimes solemn and moralising (as in the passage describing the allegorical representations of Want and Ignorance). Although for us here perception and the other methods of immersing the main character in the portrayed reality are of primary importance and will chiefly occupy us, we must not forget about or ignore his ghostly companions, “the Three Spirits,” and their role doing the portraying.¹³ The fable-like quality of the story consists in Dickens’s loosening of the strictures of space and time. But, of course, Scrooge’s travels are also travels in language, in narration. Although in the *Carol* seeing may be more significant than telling – both in a technical and a moral sense – the author and his spirits work in perfect unison.

During his didactic trips in space and time in the company of the ghosts Scrooge is often “beside himself,” as it were, and for this reason

¹³ As we have argued, a satisfactorily broad idea of internal focalization makes it necessary to include, besides perception, also cognition and emotion (if we ignore here the ideas of apperception and ideology). Mood is not only about the question “*Who perceives?*” but also about the questions “*Who knows?*” and “What a character *feels* towards something or someone he or she encounters?”

we can speak about *ecstatic* focalization as Dickens's chief device in this fairy tale and a vehicle for its moral, its spiritual message. Scrooge is first thrown into this strange state of ecstasy during a trip to the past. Here he is observing the rowdy Christmas celebrations at Fezziwig's warehouse:

During the whole of this time Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.¹⁴

Dickens is capturing here a peculiar state of mind in his protagonist. The word "scene" places Scrooge in the position of a spectator, while the entire sentence – "His heart and soul were in the scene, and his former self." – suggests participation rather than passive observation; Scrooge has for the duration of the experience, abandoned the spectator's seat and become one with his young self. Dickens uses as many as three focalizing verbs to describe his state of mind *and* to help us enter this experience: "to corroborate" (variety knowledge), "to remember" (variety cognition), "to enjoy" (variety emotion). Finally, at its termination, Scrooge re-enters his present self, albeit not without some difficulty.

Upon closer inspection, this passage is yet more complex. Yes, it does portray the double or split focalization: Scrooge is shown switching between the two selves. The first sentence, however – "During the whole of this time Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits" – offers an *external* point of view: the ghost is looking at Scrooge, observing him with a degree of distance. In our very short passage, then, we have a quick succession of *three* different perspectives: an observer (the ghost, the *Carol's* principal narrator?)¹⁵ comments on Scrooge's antics, Scrooge's former self

¹⁴ Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 36.

¹⁵ In what follows, I will take the liberty to identify the story's principal narrator with Dickens.

is all rapture, finally Scrooge returns to his “proper” self upon the termination of the vision. Let us now see if other instances of Scrooge’s travels with the Spirits confirm that there is some pattern to the ecstasies and shifts in focalization.

In the scene that immediately follows the warehouse festivities, Scrooge is shown talking to his fiancée; she has decided to part with him, because of the Idol of Gain has him now in its grip. This scene is for Scrooge a painful recollection, but the Ghost is relentless and makes Scrooge re-live it. The passage that describes the changes wrought in Scrooge by the “master-passion” of avarice is interesting in its ambiguity:

For again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years; but it had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in the eye, which showed the passion that had taken root, and where the shadow of the growing tree would fall.¹⁶

What should we think of the type of focalization used here? The old Scrooge is ostensibly the focalizer, as the verb “to see” suggests. But does he really see all the symptoms of change that are listed? Rather, the further we read the more clearly we realise that “the signs of care and avarice” are evident to another observer, either the narrator or, simply, the fiancée, even though the passage itself contains no suggestion that she is here doing the observing.

Next the Ghost takes Scrooge on a visit to the home of that woman, now a matron among a large and happy family. Here, after a brief description of the domestic scene, the principal narrator makes himself almost obtrusively present and begins to extol the charms of the woman, lost to Scrooge forever like the domestic bliss enjoyed by a man who has taken Scrooge’s place at her side:

I should have expected my arm to have grown round it [her waist] for a punishment [for the pranks played by her children], and never come

¹⁶ Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 37.

straight again. And yet I should have dearly liked, I own, to have touched her lips; to have questioned her, that she might have opened them; to have looked upon the lashes of her downcast eyes, and never raised a blush; to have let loose waves of hair, an inch of which would be a keepsake beyond price: in short, I should have liked, I do confess, to have had the lightest license of a child, and yet to have been man enough to know its value.¹⁷

Like the husband who soon enters, the narrator apparently has taken the place of his protagonist at the side of the woman, whom he, Scrooge of course, has sacrificed to his idol. But this trick produces another narrative ambiguity: the narrator studies the charms of the woman to instruct the male reader how to look at a woman with an eye that “knows the value” of what is seen. And yet Scrooge does not fall out of focus. For this bizarrely personal passage – as I read it – prepares us for the outbursts of Scrooge towards the end of the entire “stave” (Stave II). First it is: “‘Spirit!’ said Scrooge, ‘show me no more! Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me.’”¹⁸ Then, after the domestic scene: “‘Remove me!’ Scrooge exclaimed, ‘I cannot bear it!’”¹⁹

In Stave III of the *Carol*, in which Scrooge meets “the Ghost of Christmas Present,” there is surprisingly little to occupy us. Dickens takes great pains *not* to allow us to forget about Scrooge, and so Scrooge is present throughout, both in his proper person (accompanying the Ghost on the latter’s “travels,” sometimes more like escapades performed at breakneck speed) and symbolically, as “an Ogre” (among the Cratchits) and as a laughingstock (among the nephew and niece and the rest of the merry company); his presence, however, with perhaps one exception, is little more than spectral, we might say. Besides, some of the sentiments, for instance that bland compassion towards Tiny Tim, register as elicited mechanically from the breast of the miser, for we do not feel that he has as yet been *moved* deeply enough.

¹⁷ Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 39–40.

¹⁸ Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 39.

¹⁹ Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 41.

The exception is another ecstatic moment, one that cannot fail to strike us as authentically hilarious, because Scrooge has been made to laugh at himself in spite of himself:

“A merry Christmas and a happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is!” said Scrooge’s nephew. “He wouldn’t take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless. Uncle Scrooge!”

Uncle Scrooge had imperceptibly become so gay and light of heart, that he would have pledged the unconscious company in return, and thanked them in an inaudible speech, if the Ghost had given him time. But the whole scene passed off in the breath of the last word spoken by his nephew; and he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.²⁰

“Imperceptibly” is of course very interesting. “Unconscious” is equally so, suggestive in its ambiguity. The emphasis is firmly on Scrooge’s potential for spiritual transformation; he may be an Ogre, but there is a layer in his soul that has not yet been, at least not entirely, claimed or taken possession of by the frightful inhuman idol Avarice. Oddly, the Ghost does not give Scrooge time to “process” his entirely spontaneous and unexpected change of mood (if this is what “imperceptibly” conveys). In other words, Scrooge is not “finished” yet; Dickens is not finished with his human mascot. To bring to completion the tale’s neat pattern – based on time’s three-dimensionality – Scrooge needs to encounter one more Ghost or Spirit. More importantly and terrifyingly, he needs to face, not another self of Scrooge, but a void of himself.

The situation in the penultimate Stave, in which Scrooge meets “the last of the Spirits,” “the Ghost Christmas Yet to Come,” is in some respects similar, yet also grimly different and spookily surreal. The crucial moment, carefully prepared for (Scrooge is kept ignorant as to the identity of the newly deceased person), comes when he has to, in a manner of speaking, identify his own corpse. This does not take place until the end of this Stave. Dickens builds an eerie situation over which the “immovable” Spirit, pointing with its “inexorable finger” “from the grave to [Scrooge]

²⁰ Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 60.

and back again,” seems to be presiding as the coroner, or perhaps an executioner. To take in the import of the scene, a long quotation is needed:

The room was very dark, too dark to be observed with any accuracy, though Scrooge glanced round it in obedience to a secret impulse, anxious to know what kind of room it was. A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man.

Scrooge glanced towards the Phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head. The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, the motion of a finger upon Scrooge’s part, would have disclosed the face. He thought of it, felt how easy it would be to do, and longed to do it; but he had no more power to withdraw the veil than to dismiss the spectre at his side.

Oh, cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death, set up thine altar here, and dress it with such terrors as thou hast at thy command; for this is thy dominion! But of the loved, revered, and honoured head thou canst not turn one hair to thy dread purposes, or make one feature odious. It is not that the hand is heavy, and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand was open, generous, and true; the heart brave, warm, and tender, and the pulse a man’s. Strike, Shadow, strike! And see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal!

No voice pronounced these words in Scrooge’s ears, and yet he heard them when he looked upon the bed. He thought, if this man could be raised up now, what would be his foremost thoughts? Avarice, hard dealing, griping cares? They have brought him to a rich end, truly!

He lay in the dark, empty house, with not a man, a woman, or a child to say he was kind to me in this or that, and for the memory of one kind word I will be kind to him. A cat was tearing at the door, and there was a sound of gnawing rats beneath the hearthstone. What *they* wanted in the room of death, and why they were so restless and disturbed, Scrooge did not dare to think.²¹

²¹ Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 70; emphasis in the original.

Again a dizzying whirling of different perspectives, different views and visions hovering, as it were, over the anonymous dead body.

First, a moment of suspense, a moment of uneasy anticipation: the heart has already told Scrooge what he will find behind the veil. And he seems powerless in the presence of this truth. Dickens is of course careful not to lose sight of the allegorical dimension. Very recently the reader has seen Scrooge “out of his wits,” eager to join his “former self.” To unveil his future self is pointless; he knows what he must find. We all know. And so now Scrooge has become Everyman, and, to the tune of this realisation, Dickens in person takes the initiative and sermonises in exultation over the powerlessness of Death. Righteousness is a mighty guarantor of immortality, and so a man “of good deeds” is in the presence of cruel death ready to receive the mortal blow. But these are not Scrooge’s words or convictions, even though – miraculously – he hears them! The spiritual state in which he finds himself at the foot of his death-bed (and so at this point there is one more splitting of the selves),²² he is a spirit doomed, like Marley before him, to remain purgatorially chained to the burden of his sins.

Scrooge’s reflection is masterfully concluded: “They have brought him to a *rich* end, truly!” Dickens cannot refuse himself the pleasure of punning and so he catches this opportunity to use “rich” also in a meaning that perhaps is not exactly opposite to the common one, but which stresses the painful irony of the entire scene.²³ At the same time, we have in this sentence an excellent example of what in narrative theory is called free indirect speech or discourse.²⁴ Utterances of this kind blur the normally clear distinction between the voice of the narrator and that of the

²² Most strikingly in the reflection on resurrection: “*He thought*, if *this man* could be raised up now, what would be *his* foremost *thoughts*?” The first “to think” sustains of course the internal focalization, while “this man” and “his thoughts” creates a chasm of moral and existential distance between Scrooge and “his” corpse.

²³ The reader is perhaps expected to recall at this point the way in which Marley, unexpectedly for Scrooge, changes the meaning of the word “business.” In reply to Scrooge’s “‘But you were always a good man of business, Jacob, [...]’” the perturbed ghost replies: “‘Mankind was [supposed to be] my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business.’” Dickens, *The Christmas Carol*, 23–4.

²⁴ Gerald Prince provides this definition of free indirect discourse: “Free indirect discourse [...] has the grammatical traits of ‘normal’ indirect discourse, but it does not involve a tag clause (‘he said that,’ ‘she thought that’) [...]. Furthermore, it manifests at least some of the features of the char-

character (provided of course that these are not identical). And indeed, we cannot be certain here who the speaker is. The use of the third person singular suggests that we hear the narrator; but the other features, such as the exclamation mark, indicate that the sentence is an echo of a thought in the mind of Scrooge. And so does the entire situation. Free indirect speech is a device that brings the narrator and the character close together, to make room, as it were, in a third-person narrative for the voice and the mind of the principal character. Here, Scrooge is expected to arrive at this conclusion, although once more we find here also the voice of Dickens unwilling to give up *his* function as the penitent's (and also the reader's) assistant.

The paragraph that follows (the fifth in our quotation) is a superb example of Dickens's technical daring, if we may call this his decision to sustain the narrator/focalizer ambiguity of the concluding exclamation of the previous paragraph: "He lay in the dark, empty house, with not a man, a woman, or a child to say *he* [Scrooge] *was kind to me* [the man, or the woman, or the child] in this or that, and for the memory of one kind word *I will be kind to him*." The emphasised clauses are like shadows echoing (the reader will excuse this lame mixed metaphor!) these unuttered sentences: "Mr. Scrooge, thank you for doing this!" and "I must be kind to Scrooge for the kind words he once said to me!" Because of the complex syntax, mine may not be the only possible interpretation of this passage, but this complexity only brings home more convincingly Dickens's overriding concern: human beings owe one another as "fellow passengers to the grave" this kind of exchange of kindnesses, both in word and in deed.

There is no need to dwell on the disturbing moment at the end of this Stave, in which Scrooge reaches the final, much-desired recognition (in the tragic sense). Let us note that the bizarre question he asks: "Am *I* the man who lay upon the bed?" [emphasis of the original] further sustains the splitting of his identity. As he pleads with the "last" Spirit: "I am not the man I was," we realise that the process of his conversion has reached

acter's enunciation [...]." *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003; rev. edition), 34.

completion.²⁵ The haunting question that remains is, who is this man Scrooge? How many selves is he made of?

There is need to dwell upon the scenes contained in Stave V, in which we observe the “translated” miser make amends, and we are grateful that the artistry of Dickens has prevented them both from the mawkishness of a sentimentalist and triumphalism of a preacher. The last one, in which Scrooge, to his great satisfaction apparently, manages to gull Bob Cratchit into believing that he is still his wonted self is as hilarious as it is moving. For Scrooge such an act of impersonation may be proof of successful reformation. Focalization, we may say, has given way to *impersonation*. This theatricality emphasises that we are now in a truly festive mood.

For us this dissembling feat may be proof of Dickens’s self-assurance as a storyteller and a moralist dwelling peacefully in one person. So, is really Scrooge a means and a method to attain integration? Not only in or for the reader – for that is or was the obvious authorial intention, but for Dickens as well? If this does not look like an unwarranted leap of the imagination, then the lesson is that integration can and perhaps even should be attained through ecstasy. A memorable moment comes in Stave II of the *Carol*, where Dickens uses the word “ecstasy.” The scene shows the old Scrooge in tears at the sight of “his poor forgotten self as he used to be.”²⁶ Scrooge certainly has reasons to pity his former self. And yet it is a strange scene, a scene that brings in, as we will eagerly nowadays say, the theme of intertextuality. For the poor forgotten self is not really lonely; he is reading and reading intently. And the stuff that keeps him warm is the proper stuff that tales of fantasy are made on. The next thing we see is the imaginary beings. The next thing we see is the fantastic beings that populate the tales (Ali Baba, Valentine, Robinson Crusoe and Friday, and a host of others leap out of the pages, at the beckoning of the Ghost’s wand or finger and come to life. Upon seeing Ali Baba “outside the window” Scrooge “exclaims in ecstasy”: “‘Why, it’s Ali Baba.’ [...] ‘It’s dear old honest Ali Baba! Yes, yes, I know!’” So, a Spirit on a mission to

²⁵ Dickens, *The Christmas Carol*, 75.

²⁶ Dickens, *The Christmas Carol*, 31.

reform a fallen Christian raises shadows of exotic creatures in order to wrench that soul from the clutches of crass materialism? Yes. And yes, again. For Dickens, that will do, if do it must. For isn't his Christmas fairy tale also, like those fantastic tales that help young Scrooge forget himself, a means to reach an ecstatic state of the soul, a state that may be the first step (and perhaps a necessary one) on the path that leads to the Celestial City?

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